

A BIRTHDAY.

Another year has passed away—so soon!
For soon it seems, although my calm life keeps
The sameness of a shadow-line that creeps
From a blank wall from early morn to noon.
I still am waiting vainly to be taught,
By some dream realized, how much more keen
Is real joy than joy that is but seen.
In visions fashioned by too idle thought.
Still, sadly wishful, every year I build
Some scheme by which, before the next is gone,
An eager crowd of hopes may be fulfilled.
Shall I be very fast and sure ahead
The dreamed-of heaven, or half content pass on
Until some silent day shall bring the end?

THE MUTINY.

A TRAP FROM A SAILOR'S LOG.

Many a year ago, being in Australia, I shipped at Sydney in a brig called the Seal-shell. She was bound on a kind of pick up voyage, after sandal-wood, shells, and other things. We ran down to the Marshall Islands, among the Ralik Chain, and anchored in the coral lagoon at Ebon. It is commonly known as Covell's Island. The natives came out to us with lots of English sovereigns, which they were ready to barter for bits of tobacco. In answer to questions as to where they got the gold, we could extort nothing but evasive grunts from them. But, of course, we bought all we could get.

I suppose that the captain must have had in hand more than three thousand pounds in gold when they stopped bringing it off to us. There couldn't have been more than four hundred among all the rest of us. I had about forty myself, and the captain gave me ten more; indeed, he gave the same sum to every man. Fifty pounds was a large sum for a foreman man to have all at one time.

But we had some hard cases among our crew—some who would stab a man for a single sovereign, or throw him overboard for safe a minute among these fellows; so I tied up my fifty sovereigns in a bag, and took them aft, and asked the captain to keep them for me. He readily agreed to do so, and gave me a receipt.

But this act of mine was seen by Bill Boltwood, the master spirit of these fellows—Dark Bill, as he delighted to be called—and he was down on me from that hour. This Bill had been a convict in the colony, and had served out his time. I don't know what his crime was, but he was capable of anything. I can't think of any villainy that would be too bad for him to turn his hand to, and he took as much delight in the sight of blood as a tiger is said to. I've seen him and an Irishman, who was called Ugly Barney, go into the back yard of a "public" in Sydney, and batter each other's faces all to pieces for a pot of beer. They seem to do it in sheer enjoyment of the thing itself.

Well, Dark Bill says to me, with a look that was meant to bully me. "So you thought you couldn't trust your shipmates, eh, Shorpy? Or did you think you'd carry favor with the Captain, by turning him with your gold?"

"It's true," said I, looking him square in the eyes; "there's some of my shipmates that I don't like to trust."

"Do you mean that for me?" said he, blustering.

"Never mind. I didn't mention any names, but, if the jacket fits, you can put it on."

"I'd smash your head for five bob!" said he, blustering again.

"I don't think you would, if you dared," I answered him, very coolly, for I didn't fear him single-handed. "I don't doubt you'd do worse by me for fifty sovereigns; and I don't want to throw temptation in your way."

He glared at me, and ground his teeth; but he didn't offer to "smash my head." Perhaps 'twas because nobody offered him five bob to do it, but 'twould have been a dear job to him at twice the money.

I really believe they meant to rise upon us that same night, and take the brig there in the lagoon, only they didn't see their opportunity clear. The next morning we got under way from Ebon, and started on a cruise among the outer islands of the chain. We didn't find any gold at any other place, and the trade in shells was not alarming. I heard the captain say he should shove her off soon, and run down among the Caroline Islands, thence to China.

Dark Bill overheard him too; and that night there were more secret confabulations than ever among his gang. But this all seemed to blow over, and the duty went on quietly for two or three days.

We were drawing near to Strong's Island, and expected to make the land next morning. The captain had worked up his reckoning and given the course for the night, while Dark Bill was at the wheel in the first part of the watch. Soon after he was relieved and came forward, I saw him at the lee rail by the fore-casting, watching the mate, who was walking the quarter-deck. Seizing the moment when the mate's back was turned towards him, he darted into the lee fore-casting. I stood staring open-mouthed at him, and wondering what he was after. As the main and mizzen staysails were both set, he was hidden from the mate while going aloft, and reached the fore-top without being seen, except by me, and those who were with him in the plot.

As soon as I perceived that he stopped in the fore-top, it occurred to me that the arm-chairs had been left there. There were two of them, one in each top, which had been placed there while we lay at Ebon; and as we expected to go from there in a few days to some other savage island, they had not been sent down. They contained both fire-arms and cutlasses.

Pretty soon I saw something swing out by the foremast which gleamed in the moonlight; and I saw that Bill was lowering the cutlasses down by a piece of spuyarn, to his mate, Barney, who stood carelessly leaning against the foot of the mast. I no longer hesitated to make known my suspicions to the captain and officers.

I started aft, but had not made two steps when I was seized by the shoulder, borne to the deck, and gagged before I had a chance to cry out.

Abraham Hicks and Paine, with the assistance of the black (a Parsee he was

from Bombay), held me down, secured the gag in my mouth, and lashed me hand and foot; then they pushed me close under the lee of the long boat, where I would not be seen. They flashed their knives before my eyes as a warning to be quiet, and left me there. They would have killed me, no doubt, only for the fear of raising an alarm before they were ready to strike the blow at the mate and captain.

But the fools had forgotten that I had my sheath-knife in a belt round my waist. Luckily for me, too, it was a little loose in its sheath. But it was necessary to work very carefully, or they would notice my movements. I lay still till I saw Bill slide down two topsail sheets forward of the mast. His shirt was heavily filled out all round, and he took out several pistols as soon as he reached the deck, with cartridges to match. He and Barney went to work to load and prepare them, while the others covered their movements by walking before them, carelessly singing snatches of songs.

I thought now it was time for me to begin operations. By carefully lifting and writhing my body a few times, I contrived to drop my knife gently out of its sheath on the deck. Then working my self feet foremost, little by little till my head was near it, I managed, after some difficulty, to cut the lashing of the gag. The knife was very sharp, but this was the worst operation of all, and I did not succeed until I had cut my cheek quite severely. But it was not time to think of that then.

Cleared of the gag, I got the knife in my teeth, and soon severed the seizing that bound my wrists. The rest was easy. I still lay quiet after my limbs were free. I even put the gag in, again, so that when the Parsee ran round to leeward and peered at me, he thought I was all secure as I had been left.

Two more men of the other watch came up out of the fore-cabin (or fore-top) to join the mutineers; and then they closed the side of the scuttle and fastened it securely, leaving four imprisoned below.

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"Where's Shorpy?" he demanded.

"All safe," whispered Paine, pointing towards me.

The leader leaned over and glanced at me, as I lay motionless, with the gag still in my mouth.

"All right," said he; "we'll do for him afterwards. Softly as cats, now boys—come on!"

They passed round the head of the boat, but they were not quicker than I was. I rose to my feet, and darted aft on the lee side. One of the after-hatches was left off, as I well knew. I dropped lightly down upon the water-casks, and crept out of sight.

It seemed to me at that moment that the power of all my senses was centred in my ears. But, instead of a struggle or a fall, as I had expected, I heard only a loud slam of the doors leading into the cabin; and then angry dispute between Bill and one of his own gang, Abraham Hicks. Cautiously I leaned forward into the hatchway, and heard enough to satisfy me as to the cause of the quarrel.

It would seem that just as the mutineers reached the break of the quarter-deck, where it was necessary to ascend two steps, the mate, unconscious of danger, stepped into the cabin-door, which opened aft near the helmsman. But, instead of falling back, and waiting quietly till he should come out again, Hicks, who was in advance, dashed on, despite the whispered remonstrance of Bill and Barney, and slammed the doors. Then seizing a marlin-spike, he drove it securely into the staple, thus imprisoning all the officers below. The alarm was thus given, and nothing accomplished.

The rage of Bill was fearful at having his plan bungled in this manner. He had intended to kill the mate, if possible, without noise; and after that it would be easy to manage the second mate and captain, taken by surprise in their berths. The quarrel grew fiercer and louder—I heard a blow—another—then a pistol-shot, and a heavy fall.

No one seemed to take any trouble about the fallen man. He must have been shot dead, I thought, for I heard no groan or movement, such as a wounded man would make. Bill ordered the Parsee to go forward and stand guard over the fore-cabin, and the steward to remain at the cabin-doors.

"Here, Paine," said he, "come with me. Bring the lantern from the round-house." "They were coming into the after-hold! I had only time to crawl up into the 'wing,' and crouch down into the narrow space behind the water-casks, when the two jumped down with a light and a bucket. They did not come towards me, but went in on the opposite side, where there was a barrel of liquor standing on its head.

"Give me the top-maul," said Bill; "there, on the coils of the rigging."

A few blows forced in the head, and the bucket was filled by dipping it into the barrel.

"We are in a bad scrape, now," he muttered, "thanks to that sneaking blackhead, Hicks. But he'll never bungle another job of this kind."

"How are we going to manage it now?" asked Paine. "If we open the doors and let them up, we shall have some hard fighting to do."

"Yes. We could overpower them, I suppose; but some of us would get killed in doing it. We must smoke 'em. Get that iron pot and bring it on deck with us. There's a lot of brimstone in the round-house."

The pot was within three feet of my hiding place. But luckily Paine did not bring the lantern with him. He set it down in the hatchway, secured the pot, and the two went on deck again to prime themselves with liquor, and prepare their infernal smoke-pot.

I darted forward over the top of the casks to the fore-cabin bulk-head.

The four men who were imprisoned there were all up and dressed, but had no light burning, preparing to wait in the dark for the expected attack of the mutineers. They had been roused by the pistol shot in the other part of the ship to find themselves imprisoned.

A part of the partition between them and me was in the form of a light wooden grating or lattice, to admit a free circulation of air. This had already been silently removed, and at a whisper from me, we all went aft together. No fire-arms could be got until we could open a communication with the officers in the cabin. This we dared not yet attempt, as the partition was solid, and some noise must be made in wrenching a plank off.

The brig had been whaling on a previous voyage, and the bunch of Janes, tied together, were still on board. These we found in a rack under the deck-carlines. Though a little rusty, they were still sharp enough to be terrible weapons in the hands of desperate men, if brought to bay.

We had hardly secured these, when there was a rattle at the hatchway, and the pot of fire and sulphur was lowered down. The hatch was instantly clapped on, and the tarpaulin drawn all over. Had we been taken unawares, a minute or two would have been sufficient to smother us to death. But we were prepared to meet it, several tin cups having been brought from the fore-cabin and filled with water from the cask. Before the tarpaulin covering was fully secured over the hatch, the fire was all out, and I had given the word to the officers in the cabin to open communication by forcing off a plank.

The planks ran up and down, and a few blows of an axe at the foot, given from the after side, would start the spikes. At the first blow, we heard the sound of dancing feet overhead, and then the drunken shout of Dark Bill—"Ay! knock away, my hearties! I thought the brimstone would start ye! Keep a good watch on the fore scuttle, you darkeys! Go there with him, Paine! We shall have a break-out soon, either forward or aft, but they'll be blinded with smoke, and we'll have the advantage of 'em."

A few more blows of the axe—the plank is starting! But how those three spikes seemed to cling to the tough wood. The enemy became suspicious, and lifted off the hatch.

"Hallo! the fire's out!" The voice was that of Ugly Barney. "Here, Bill!—Paine! rally here at the after-hatch! Quick, before they break through the bulkhead!"

Barney jumped down to seize the pot. An opening was already made, and we were through it, one at a time. He caught sight of us, but before he could retreat, Joe Bonner let drive his trusty lance, which passed through the ruffian's body, pinning him to the stanchion. His cry of mortal agony brought his comrades to aid him. We were beyond their reach. Our whole force was collected in the cabin.

But we had a friend in the enemy's camp. My chum, Dave Kent, was at the wheel, and Bill, at the pistol's mouth, had kept him there; for he could not spare one of his trusty men to relieve him. He intended, no doubt, to kill him, as well as myself, after he got full possession of the brig. I had heard them hunting for me, and Bill decided that I must be either under deck or aloft.

"If he is aloft," said he, "we'll attend to his case when we get daylight. If he's crawled below, let him smell brimstone with the rest!"

I knew all along that Dave Kent wouldn't lose a chance of helping us, if he saw one. But he was powerless until the moment when the mutineers rallied to the hatchway, at the piercing cry from Barney, leaving only the steward at the cabin-door. Quick as thought, Dave seized this fellow from behind with his powerful grip. The pistol and cutlases were both useless to him, for the movement had been so sudden and well-timed, that before he could raise an alarm, he was jerked over the low tail-rail into the sea, the cabin-doors were open, and up we poured, with every advantage of position, holding the quarter-deck in possession.

It was give and take for a minute. But there were only four of the mutineers left, and we were the stronger party. The second mate got his arm broken by a shot from Bill, and I got a cut on the arm from a cutlass thrown at my head by the Parsee. But he and Paine were both shot dead; and Dark Bill, the chief desperado, crazy with rum and rage, bleeding from two or three wounds, knocked his chum senseless with his last empty pistol, and jumped overboard, with a defiant oath on his lips. You may well suppose that we did not stop to pick him up. The last man fell on his knees; and his life was spared till we arrived at Sydney, where he was tried and hung.

Our voyage was broken up by this scrape, for we were too short-handed to venture among the savages. But we made a good cruise for the short time we were absent, for we brought our gold home safe, and spent it without troubling ourselves much about where it came from.

If you are in trouble or a quandary, tell your wife—that is, if you have one—all about it at once. Ten to one, her invention will solve your difficulty sooner than all your logic. The wit of woman has been praised, but her instincts are quicker and keener than her reason. Counsel with your wife, or your mother, or sister, and be assured light will flash upon your darkness.

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